21: Asboe M-3 (no date) 1932 AJ4 West Tibetans AJ4

Western Tibet. **Asboe.**

Notes on Childbirth in Manchat (Western Tibet). *By Walter Asboe.*

841 Certain taboos exist in Manchat in respect to women during their period of menstruation, and also for expectant mothers. During menstruation a woman is not allowed to approach **161** the family hearth, but must eat her food, and perform her household duties at a reasonable distance from the fireplace. She may not wash or handle the kitchen utensils during this period, for she is regarded as ceremonially unclean; and any infraction of the taboo imposed upon her is thought to be a direct affront to the god of the family hearth.

843 No restrictions, however, in the way of performing the ordinary domestic duties are laid upon the pregnant woman except that she must be on her guard against the influence of the 'Evil Eye.'
844 She will therefore retire discreetly on the approach of a stranger. A woman may not on any account bear her child in the vicinity of the household temple, or where there are any images of the gods. An apartment in the rear of the house is therefore reserved for this purpose, and failing this, she must retire to an outhouse or shed.

To cite a personal experience, I was once called to a case of difficult labour, and I found the patient lying in a dark room quite by herself. On urging the occupants of the house to remove the expectant mother to another room where one could at least enjoy the advantage of light and air, they replied that they could not comply with my request, as, by so doing, they would incur the displeasure of their household gods. Further, it is taboo for the daughter of the house to give birth to her child in her own home, so that what frequently happens is that she must find refuge in the shelter of the cowshed.

At a confinement, any cooked food which happens to be in the house is taboo, and must be thrown away, or given to the cattle. Following the birth of a child, the mother is obliged to emerge from the house, accompanied by one or two women, and proceed to the nearest spring. On arrival there, a screen of blankets is erected, behind which she must perform her ablutions. After the birth of the first child, the mother has to wash herself three times, whilst the husband must also purify himself by bathing. By way of propitiating the evil spirits, the mother scatters grain or food hither and thither as she proceeds to the village spring to cleanse herself.

It is also customary to stick an iron trident and an axe into the ground when the ablutions have been performed. In the meantime the placenta is buried in the earth, the hole being dug with the knife which was used for cutting the cord, and the handle of the knife is buried also. During the woman's absence, the floors of the house are freshly mud-washed, and all utensils thoroughly scoured. Should another house lie contiguous to the one in which a confinement occurs, the occupants behave as if the birth had actually taken place in it. On the completion of the ceremonial purification, the mother is covered in a large blanket with two slits in it for the eyes, and returns to her home.

WALTER ASBOE.

[139]